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# How do injecting drug users perceive needle and syringe programmes?



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## Background

- Needle and syringe programmes (NSPs) are an effective harm reduction strategy amongst injecting drug users (IDUs)
- However, according to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, there is a lack of evidence on how injecting drug users perceive NSPs in the UK and what encourages or discourages them from using such services

## Aims

- To investigate how IDUs perceive NSPs and what encourages and discourages them from using such services
- To suggest strategies to those providing NSPs to increase the number of IDUs using the service

## Barriers to NSP use

- A number of barriers were common to all NSPs:
  - Inconvenient location or opening hours, especially for IDUs living on the outskirts of Bristol
  - Lack of advertising/lack of awareness of advertising
  - Attitude of performance and image enhancing drug injectors

“You are a drug user and you are a needle user etc. but you do differentiate yourself from... someone that uses recreational”

- A number of barriers applied mainly to pharmacy NSPs:
  - Stigma from staff and the public, which was linked to a lack of privacy

“They don’t have a separate room... to do the exchange in, it happens over the counter, five people on either side of you”

- Range and quantity of injecting equipment provided
- Refusal to supply new equipment without return of used equipment

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## Methods

- 40 IDUs who were either NSP users at Bristol Drugs Project and/or a local pharmacy were recruited in November 2015
- Data collection involved qualitative semi-structured interviews in a private room in a variety of locations
- Interviews transcripts analysed thematically
- Approved by the University of Bath’s ethics procedures

## Results

- Three key themes were identified:
  1. Barriers to NSP use
  2. Incentives for NSP use
  3. Strategies to increase NSP use

## Incentives for NSP use

- Convenient location and opening hours (including mobile exchange and hostel visits)
- Positive attitude of BDP staff

“You’re treated as a decent human being. Not as someone who thinks... he’s on crack – he’s a bad person”

- Provision of additional services, e.g. counselling and groups
- Wide range of high quality equipment available from BDP

## Strategies to increase NSP use

“They’re [BDP] a brilliant service... they should just continue what they are doing”

- Extended opening hours, especially on Sundays
- A wider catchment area, possibly via the mobile exchange, home deliveries or involving more pharmacies
- Better advertising of pharmacy and mobile NSPs
- Improving privacy in pharmacies through use of consultation rooms and presentation of a pre-printed card, to avoid asking publically for an exchange
- Education of pharmacy staff to reduce stigma and prevent supply refusal
- Pre-made equipment packs for quicker collections from BDP
- Providing cookers and sterile water